

"I Have Seen Thy Salvation!"

"A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel"—Luke 2:32

ONE VERY outstanding feature of the Truth is that all things are moving to a pre-determined end; and around the personality of the Son of God.

In our daily readings we are, by some connecting thought, generally close to him, the Lord Jesus Christ. Frequently in all three readings we are reminded of him in some way—his pre-eminence, character, work or destiny. This from promise, prophecy and type in the early beginnings, right through to the actual records of his personal mission, the establishment of its doctrinal significance, and the application of it to the way of life of the believer—all to a good, ultimate purpose.

We are privileged to realize there is a purpose working out, one which meantime has its historic sequences, but which *must* consummate in the achievement of its aim at some time or another; and that further, in the economy of the Deity, *that point of time is fixed*.

We can already see, through the mists of the present, the brightness of that glad morning, and feel the comfort and incentive of knowing, without doubting, that the present chaos *will* give place to a divine order, in God's time and in God's way.

My brethren and sisters, the *general* view of God, of the Bible and the future, is a very sad one. Millions of people call themselves "Christian," but do not read their Bible. They rest their faith (if it can be so termed) on a strange accumulation of error universally called "Christian dogma" today. Steeped in this vain superstition, the plan, the Great Plan of God, cannot be known to them. We doubt whether they believe He *has* any plan—whether there *is* any predetermined consummation.

We once were just as blind, but our Father caused the Truth to be revealed to us. There came a time when our eyes were opened. This knowledge we have received as a precious gift, and we find that the whole concept revolves around this man Christ Jesus, and reaches from Eden, to Eden formed on earth again.

This knowledge broadens out into a sort of historical panorama in the mind, and resolves at the end into the glorious vision of the day of his glory when he shall be "Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Though the full disclosure of that day of distinction will exceed mortal imagination, the mind reaches forward in the hope of the scriptures and forms from the various details given a picture of that happy state, whilst allowing that limited mortal vision must be far short of the mark.

The whole consideration—fed *day by day* by a loving application to God's Word, (pointing forward as it does to that 'Eternal weight of Glory' spoken of by Paul), and kept in the fore-front by attention to His business—leads to continual self-examination. Only *so* can we fit ourselves, and of course, *we so much want to be there!*

The word of exhortation is an especial call to that exercise, a stirring up of the mind, an urging to consider; and on the basis of the Truth of the Scriptures and the Faithfulness of God, it has a *large element of comfort*—the Sword of the Spirit with the Balm of Gilead. Our meditation may reveal that we are sadly lacking, but reflection assures that there is "hope in the end" IF we assure our hearts before Him and *rest upon Him so that He may help us win through*.

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IN THE present readings, we have insight into the life of that Great Son—his goings about, his work, his teachings. We can thus actually draw alongside him.

His words, so briefly given, are very precious; not only because they are rare in their brevity, but also because they are *Spirit and Life* and originate with the Father. "He went about doing good," but it was only part of a larger mission, the beginning of a new phase; there was the future. The chapter read has its own pictures. The Gospel readings are full of scenes for our enlightened imagination. They can only be seen, however, in that proper focus, *the larger setting of the Purpose*. If we apprehend not what this man is talking about, the whole presentation is faulty, and any sentimental dressing up of the scenes in lieu of the Truth (a habit of commentators) is valueless.

Here is our privilege, to behold the solid and substantial beauty of it as a vitally necessary contribution to the end in view. One must *know* that this Kingdom of God, the Hope of Israel, is still to be realized in a state far different from the present. That it is not a collection of believers in a so-called "gospel age," but a *divine conception of transcendingly greater dimensions*. To ignore this is to discount the wonderful words associated with his birth in the opening of this very section of revealed Truth. We shortly come to them in considering a few things from this—Luke's record.

Luke is called by the Apostle Paul, "the beloved physician." They spent a lot of time together. He was with Paul in his later journeys at least, and was doubtless a physical, as well as a spiritual, comfort to the great apostle. We know little of his life, and nothing of his origin. On certain premises it is assumed he was a Gentile, a proselyte. Under God's hand, he contributes much to our information, in detail omitted by the other evangelists.

We go back to chap. 1, last Sunday's readings, a wonderful story, the miraculous facts of which we cannot lightly pass. In verse 3 he claims "having had perfect understanding from the very first" in speaking of this, a new beginning.

Let us take the full significance of these first chapters, against the background of history. Israel was definitely under the heel of the conqueror, the oppressor, but the hope of the deliverer, the Messiah, never died. Of this much Paul's words certify us. *But for 400 years there had been no voice nor hearing!*

Now, in the momentous hour of a new dispensation, the long silence is broken. How many understood the "Times" of Daniel, and in their *own* times were looking for redemption (consolation) in Israel, we cannot know. Sufficient to know that the hope existed, that it was a national one and consistent with the promises of God, a consummation to which "all the 12 tribes hoped to come."

Luke takes up the work on the threshold of this new order, a part of the larger cycle of the Purpose. To read with care is to be impressed with the superlative value and importance of his singular account, and the stupendous nature of the phase he relates.

Initiating this, an august personage is sent from the Throne of God, even the angel Gabriel. A fitting messenger! He it was who came to Daniel, and who gave the 70 week prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. He it is who now heralds the coming of both forerunner and Christ. Not with clarion voice from the top of a mount ("Hear, O Israel"), but in a quiet way to the individuals first concerned. The result would in due time speak for itself. Note that out of all Israel, he came to *one* man and *one* woman, but the effect will reach to the end of time.

It is apparent from verse 12, that Zacharias (performing his service in the Temple) was afraid when Gabriel appeared. But the assurance came to him, "Fear not, Zacharias"—as it had been given long before, "Fear not, Daniel," and later would be, "Fear not, Mary."

"Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

"And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

"And he shall go before Him (the Lord) in the spirit and power of Elias . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (vs. 14-17).

Zacharias' faith was sorely tried. *Worthy man, walking in a blameless manner, but his mind wavered at the marvel of it!* He said—

"Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife well stricken in years" (v. 18).

The answer seems to commence reproachfully (v. 19)—

"I am **Gabriel**, that stand **in the presence of God**; and am **sent to speak** unto thee, and to **show thee** these glad tidings."

And then, as if to say "How shall ye know?" continues—

"And behold thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words which shall be fulfilled in their season . . ." Which they were in the sequel we will note.

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THE SAME illustrious personage comes to Mary (vs. 28-38):

"Blessed art thou among women. Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God. Thou shalt bring forth a son and shalt call his name Jesus.

"The Power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

And Mary says (v. 38)—

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

How tremendous the issues from these simple statements! Mary shortly visits Elizabeth, who, moved by the Spirit exclaims (v. 43)—

"Whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

At this time also, Mary is moved to magnify the Lord, and rejoice in spirit for His mercy (vs. 46-55), using phrases significant of the Hope of Israel.

John is born, and Zacharias, his tongue loosed after many months, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied (v. 67 and on) in similar terms. The tenor of these utterances, of the Holy Spirit, is also indicative of *faith in the end promised*.

Then we get the record of chapter 2, the birth of Jesus in the lowliest of circumstances, providentially arranged, in an apparently coincidental manner, in the place named in prophecy over 700 years earlier. To effect this, Mary and Joseph had to move from Nazareth to Bethlehem at exactly the appointed time.

Beautiful child stories have been woven around the terms of this chapter, and great stress is placed on the song of the angels, but *how could one apply it to any part, place or time of this "present evil world"?*

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (v. 14).

Truly that *will* be the *ultimate* effect of Christ's work, but how any could see it in the present, or even expect it by mere preaching, is of course past our comprehension. MacArthur, in his recent speech from Tokyo admitted: "*Past endeavours have failed,*" stating that the "*only solution is in lifting the character of man himself.*"

There is an element of truth in this, but how is it to be done? Not by the force of the arms of the world, but by the all-prevailing future power of him who is "called Faithful and True" (Rev. 19:11), who will sit upon the white horse, for—

"In **righteousness** doth **he** judge and make war."

He can discern the "thoughts and intents of the heart." He alone (and those who are taught of him) will in that day be able to detect and purge out the rebellious, and teach the remainder, leading them in the ways of righteousness— "*Israel's Hope and Earth's Desire*."

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PROCEEDING with chap. 2. When the babe was taken to the Temple in fulfilment of Law relating to the firstborn, the devout old man Simeon (who himself waited "for the consolation of Israel" and to whom it had been revealed he should, before he died, see the "Lord's Anointed"), added his testimony. Taking the babe into his arms he said—

"Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

A little later (vs. 36-38) Anna the prophetess likewise—

"Gave thanks to the Lord and spake of Him to all those that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" ('Israel' in the margin).

Now referring back to chap. 1, Zacharias, in his prophecy by the Holy Spirit "Blessed the Lord God of Israel" for the redemption seen, and *associated the past and the future* (as recorded in vs. 69-75)—

"As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets;"

"The mercy promised to our Fathers;"

"The oath which He sware to our Father Abraham;"

"That we being delivered . . . might serve Him without fear . . . all the days of our life."

Mary, in her magnification of the Lord (v. 46 and on) said—

"He hath holpen His servant Israel . . . In remembrance of His mercy, as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed for ever."

All these declarations of faith and hope would reflect back on Gabriel's annunciation (vs. 32-33)—

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

"And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and OF HIS KINGDOM THERE SHALL BE NO END."

Continuing the story, Luke states (2:39-40)—

"And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.

"And the child grew, and **waxed strong in spirit**, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him."

Looking forward from this point, the natural view would expect an interesting tale of his childhood and youth, with pleasing details of his exemplary behaviour. "*What a fine guide*," one might think, "*for bringing up our children!*"

But WOULD it have been regarded, any more than other Scripture is, on that point or others? We hardly think so. We have sufficient, we can be sure to give us "the whole counsel of God" without it.

We *do* have an *indication* at the end of this chapter—the journey to Jerusalem when he was 12 years old, and his interview with the doctors in the Temple, when his understanding and answers astonished them. His words to his mother at that time, give us food for thought (v. 49)—

"How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

These are the first recorded words of the Lord Jesus Christ. The implication in them is rather, we believe:

"Why did you look **elsewhere**?—THIS is my Father's house."

We wonder why Mary, in particular (v. 50)—

"Understood not the saying that he spake unto them."

Would she not recollect the different things she had "hid in her heart" from time to time: specifically—

"He shall be called the Son of the Highest . . . He shall be called the SON OF GOD."
. . . *and the words of Gabriel . . . and the angels' song?*

Of course, he went back to Nazareth with them, and was subject unto them. This, up to the time of his public ministry, was part of that holy life, God pleasing, of which we have no more detail, but which eventually brought him to Jordan, and John's baptism, and the witness from on high—

"Thou art My beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased."

As we read on, and feel his gracious presence, on the shores of Galilee, let us remember that *a great work is still before him, here, on earth . . .* and we rest on his assurance to his disciples—

"**I will come again**, so that where I am, there ye may be also."

You will remember that when reading from Isaiah in the synagogue (4:18)—

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor . . . to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."
—he added, as he sat down—

"This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

And they wondered. He was quoting from Isaiah 61 and by comparing, you will be able to see he stopped in the middle of a verse. The ensuing words are:

"And the DAY OF VENGEANCE of our God."

The following verses in Isaiah, and also the next chapters, are evidently prophecies of the Kingdom, where "the day of God's vengeance" is also "the year of His Redeemed."

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WE ARE most evidently living in the time of the end. "*The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.*" These are wonderful days. Faith is almost superseded. World events show a shaping towards the end, and the nations are taking their proper places. Who would have thought that Russia would rise to such power so fast!

It is time for the Tarshish power to enact one of the last scenes of her destined role, that of "bringing Zion's sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, to the land brought back from the sword." The stage will then be set for the finale. "How long to the end of these wonders?" Daniel enquired about this. So do we.

But if the Lord is to call away his own people for judgment *before* he steals upon the world as a thief in the night, that time would appear to be upon us. *Let us be ready—let us be working.*

He is the Son, the Elder Son, over his own house—

"Whose house are we IF we hold fast."

The zeal of that house absorbed his whole being—

"The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up."

We are adopted sons and daughters, and the responsibility for part of the work now rests upon *us*. God has to *work with us*, and He cannot do so unless we *do* work.

We are "workers together with God" (beautiful thought!), and we must ALL be "about our Father's business," diligent to "make our calling and election *sure*." —G. G. Sr.
